



If parents could choose, the bureaucrats would lose

By Jim Waters

A new survey debunks the myth that only right-wingers and rich folks favor giving Kentucky parents a choice when it comes to where their children attend school.

The results of the recent poll conducted by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice indicate that parents of all political stripes and economic groups want more choices when it comes to education.

The survey of 1,200 likely Kentucky voters (with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points) found:

- Only 23 percent of respondents believe Kentucky’s traditional public schools do an “excellent” or even “good” job. On the other hand, 86 percent likely would opt for schools other than traditional public schools — if they could choose.
- Nearly 50 percent of respondents indicated they would select a private education for their children. More than 10 percent said they would send their children to charter schools – if they could choose.
- A big disconnect exists between what Kentuckians say they want and what the commonwealth’s public-education system offers. For example, while nine out of 10 Kentucky students attend traditional public schools, only 13 percent of respondents would choose a traditional public school for their child — if they could choose.

Right now, the only choice parents in Louisville – Kentucky’s largest school district – have is what former Jefferson County Public Schools Superintendent Stephen Daeschner once told me was “managed” choice.

What Daeschner meant: Parents can *request* a better school for their children, but it doesn’t mean that happens. If it doesn’t, about the only recourse those parents have is to hire a lawyer. And that’s what some outraged parents in Louisville have done.

The Jefferson County Public Schools busing plan forced 5-year-olds to ride between 40 and 56 miles on a bus every school day. The new plan also required a kindergartner to attend Shelby Elementary School in Germantown — 20 miles away from her home — rather than Stopher Elementary School, which is just a couple of miles from her home.

The distance stinks. But even more outrageous: Bureaucrats assigned this youngster to Shelby Elementary, a school that flunked “No Child Left Behind” requirements over a four-year period. In fact,

because of its track record, the school achieved Tier 3 status and must give parents of children attending it the option of transferring.

Yep, JCPS bureaucrats at the central office force Louisville families to send kindergartners to a school that has been such a failure its own students qualify to transfer.

This stuff happens when choices get “managed” rather than granted.

A judge has denied the parents’ request for an injunction to keep the school district from carrying out this ill-advised plan. But these parents are talking appeal.

They have attorney Teddy Gordon – who doesn’t give up easily – representing them. Gordon fought the district’s busing plan – based on a racial-quota plan – all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and won. JCPS bureaucrats remain sore from the whipping Gordon gave them in court.

But even if these parents win, not all families can hire lawyers. What about their choices, or even more important, their kids?

It’s time for the Legislature and governor to ensure that parents – not school boards, teachers unions, or central-office bureaucrats who offer “managed choice” – decide what’s best for their children.

Yes, by their very nature, surveys offer limited insight. But this one clearly shows school choice enjoys wide bipartisan support with even more Democrats favoring charter schools than Republicans (55 percent to 54 percent). A majority of middle-class and low-income households support it, too.

The anti-choice forces face a hard time “managing” this news.

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